

# EPHESIANS

(Study 9) Ephesians 5:21-6:9: Week beginning 19 May 2008

We are still in that part of Ephesians where Paul is talking about how we should live, practically, as Christians. In 5:18 he said, *Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.* There then followed various marks of being filled with the Spirit: encouraging each other with psalms, singing to God, giving thanks to Him... and submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

That last theme - of submission - raises the question, "what does that mean? And who is to submit to whom?" Paul answers this here. Note that in terms of the flow of Paul's argument, 5:21 is a headline for what follows, rather than an antidote to it. In other words, he is not saying that all should submit to all - otherwise parents would be submitting to children, etc. This is not a politically correct section! Pray, therefore, that you will be willing to receive this passage as God's word.

It's sometimes said that Paul cannot be taken seriously on marriage here, because he also condones slavery. However, you will notice a significant difference in his approach to the two. Marriage reflects the relationship of Christ to His church; no such pattern exists for slavery.

## 1. Wives and husbands (5:22-32)

### A. Wives!

\* What reasons does Paul give for wives submitting to their husbands?

℞ How might this look in practice for you?

### B. Husbands!

\* Note that (surprisingly for our culture, which regards love only as a feeling) Paul *commands* husbands to love their wives. What's the standard of love required?

\* What's the aim of loving one's wife like this?

\* Of what is marriage a model? (31-32)

℞ Husbands: how can you do this? (Example: financial sacrifice by husbands for wives; time together...)

## Objections

Do you agree with these statements?

\* "Paul is simply reflecting the culture of his day." (See *Ephesians 4:17*)

\* "Paul didn't like women." (See *Acts 16:11-15 and Romans 16:1-16*)

### Children and parents (6:1-4)

\* What is required of children?

\* And of their parents?

### Slaves and masters (6:5-9)

There were an estimated 60m slaves in the Roman empire: a **very substantial** proportion of the workforce. Slaves were of all kinds - not just menial, but schoolteachers, etc. So this was not the same as the slave trade of the 18th century. Nor is it quite the same as modern work, either; but the latter is the closest equivalent.

\* What are slaves to do for their masters?

\* When might slaves be tempted to serve poorly?

\* How does recognising that Christ is his real, ever-present Master change this?

\* How might masters think that they could get away with mistreating their slaves?

### Note: is Paul condoning slavery?

A. Paul is not actually condoning the system at all. No appeal to an eternal principle, as with marriage (the heavenly marriage) or children (the fifth commandment). Indeed, the way he addresses the slaves as valued members of the Christian community, and the limits he puts on masters, would have sounded quite astonishing to some.

B. Nevertheless, we have to observe in all honesty that he doesn't have as his top priority the overthrow of the system. Why not? Because his top priority is the *changing of people within the system*. Deliverance from the deepest form of slavery he has already flagged up: being *dead in transgressions and sins*, ch2. From that situation God has *made us alive!* That's the kind of slavery that is top of Paul's agenda to get rid of.